ASPECTS OF *BARAKA* (BLESSINGS) AND RITUAL DEVOTION AMONG MEDIEVAL MUSLIMS AND JEWS[1]

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ABSTRACT

Baraka (lit. blessing) lay at the foundation of Muslim and Jewish conceptions and perceptions of the sacred. Medieval devotees sought the *baraka* of prophets, saints and devotional objects. This study considers the physical and devotional setting for the transmission of *baraka* and the ritual acts devotees performed in order to acquire it.

This essay highlights a number of aspects of the rituals of saint veneration which Muslims and Jews in the medieval Islamic Near East performed. More specifically, it will explore the concept of *baraka* (blessings) and the manner in which devotees identified it through perceptory means and sought to obtain it through the performance of ritual acts. *Baraka*, which has a variety of meanings is an innate force, sometimes rendered as "blessings," which dead and living saints (i.e., holy persons), relics such as garments, hair and nail clippings, and pilgrimage sites possessed. It is an emotive force perceived and apprehended through the senses and the devotee's experiencing and interacting with the holy by visiting shrines and performing pilgrimage ritual. All righteous individuals possessed *baraka*, but only saints through their charisma, devotion, exemplary learning and piety possessed a sufficient degree to render them as objects of *ziyāra* or pious visitation. This is particularly the case among Muslims throughout the Near East who venerated living and dead saints. Rulers, theologians, students and common people all sought *baraka*. Seeking *baraka* was both a private and a public affair. In so doing, devotees engaged the holy and each other at pilgrimage sites. *Baraka* might be transferred from saint to person through the performance of a ritual

[1] This essay is based upon a forthcoming study of Islamic relics, as well as the author's doctoral thesis, "Sacred Journeys to Sacred Precincts: The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria," unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1998.

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act such as a Sufi master investing a fellow Sufi or disciple in private or before others with a mantle commonly referred to as "khirqa." Men and women also approached saints in public and sought their *baraka*. *Baraka* was also produced from the act of pilgrimage to a shrine with which devotees made physical contact through kissing, rubbing themselves against it, lying on it, or spending the night in its presence. The existence of *baraka* at a shrine insured miraculous cures for the infirm as it did stability, relief, abundance, prosperity and happiness. Jews, Muslims and Christians engaged in such rituals. Geertz's description of a shaykh's disciple washing his ill master's garment and then drinking the water serves a powerful example of how *baraka* functions. After drinking the water, Geertz observes that the disciple, "returned to the sheikh, his eyes aflame, not with illness, for he did not fall sick, but as though he had drunk a powerful wine."[2]

For Muslims the supreme manifestation of *baraka* is the Qur'an and the five pillars of Islam.[3] Similarly, Jews understood *baraka* to be embodied in the Torah. *Baraka* sanctified a location through the presence or the apparent presence or manifestation of the saint, and through the existence of physical and devotional "relics." Shrines and portative holy objects such as Torah scrolls, venerable copies of the Qur'an and the sandal of the Prophet Muḥammad possessed *baraka*. Devotees made pilgrimage to obtain blessings from such objects as they did from tombs and shrines. In both the Islamic and Jewish contexts, holiness emanated from God. "Objects, persons, sites and activities that are employed in the service of God, derive their sacred character from that relationship."[4]

Baraka and the 'Uthmānī codex

A copy of the Qur'an which the third Caliph 'Uthmān dispatched to al-Shām was believed to have been kept in Tiberias and was subsequently transferred to Damascus after the Mongol invasion of Palestine where it was deposited in the congregational mosque. During the fourteenth century, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa reports of the congregational mosque of Damascus:

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[2] Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 32.

[3] Edward Westermarck, *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilization* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1933), 87.

[4] "Kedushah," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 9:866.

> In its eastern corner opposite the mihrab is a great chest which contains the Noble copy of the Qur'an which the Commander of the Faithful ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān dispatched to al-Shām. That cabinet is opened every Friday after the noon prayer. The people crowd around to kiss that noble Qur'an (*fa-yazdaḥim al-nās ʿalā lathm dhālika al-muṣḥaf al-karīm*). There the people make their debtors swear on it and those against whom they have a claim (*ghuramā'ahum wa-man iddaʿā ʿalayhi shay'an*).[5]

Times of crisis such as invasions, drought, famine and plague necessitated the invocation of venerable copies of the Qur'an as well as making pilgrimage to tombs of holy men. The copy of the Qur'an compiled by ʿUthmān is one such example. In the year 543/1148, the Franks approached Damascus with 10,000 knights. The people of Damascus, reports al-Dhahabī, were in a state of great devotion to God. "They brought out the ʿUthmānī codex to the courtyard of the Congregational Mosque. Women and children raised a clamor while barcheaded."[6] During the reign of al-Malik al-Manṣūr Sayf al-Dīn Qalāwūn in 680/1282, at the time of an imminent Mongol invasion, the people of Damascus partook in a ritual procession to the congregational mosque, as did the inhabitants of Baʿlabakk who also made pilgrimage to the tomb of the Sufi saint Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Yūnīnī.

> On the morning of Wednesday, 13 Jumādā II (October), all of the people took refuge in the Congregational Mosque of Damascus—the weak, the young and the old humbling themselves in worship (*yataḍarraʿūna*) in the presence of God the Exalted to make the Muslim faith victorious and destroy the enemy. The noble ʿUthmānī copy of the Qur'an and other venerable copies were taken out [carried] on the heads of the people. Accompanying them (the copies of the Qur'an) were the preacher, the Qur'an reciters, and the muezzins to the prayer place in Qaṣr Ḥajjāj, requesting victory from God the Exalted. The inhabitants of Baʿlabakk did likewise and ascended to the tomb (*ḍarīḥ*) of Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Yūnīnī. . . .[7]

Ibn Kathīr reports that the ʿUthmānī codex was again invoked in 711/1312 when a levy of 500 dirhams for each of 1,500 horsemen was imposed on Damascenes. The people, accompanied by the preacher

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[5] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Gharā'ib al-Amṣār wa ʿAjā'ib al-Asfār (Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa)* (Beirut, 1975), 208.

[6] Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *al-ʿIbar fī Khabar Man Ghabar*, ed. M. Zaghlūl, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1988), 2:463.

[7] Mūsā b. Muḥammad al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl Mir'āt al-Zamān* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dā'irat al-Maʿārif), 4:92-93.

and the judges, marched in procession to confront the Mamluk governor Karāy armed with the ʿUthmānī codex, the relic of the Prophet (*al-athar al-nabawī*) (i.e., the sandal) and the caliphal standards.[8] Other venerable copies of the Qur'an were commonly found in boxes affixed to the tombs of saints.

Torah scrolls

Venerable Torah scrolls believed to have been writtten by prophets and patriarchs were objects of pilgrimage. In Egypt, the Synagogues of Moses at Maḥalla, Taṭay and especially Dammūh were pilgrimage centers for Egyptian Jews who flocked there on the Holy Days.[9] The Torah scroll was an object of veneration.

Dammūh was the most sacred pilgrimage place for Egyptian Jewry. Jews from all over flocked there during the Pentecost when the Torah was revealed and on 7 Adar the day of Moses' birth and death. They believed that God spoke to Moses there. Jews actively sought blessing from the Torah scroll in this synagogue.[10] Some risked their lives to travel to Dammūh because of the holiness of the place.[11]

One Cairene Jew did not hesitate to roll himself beneath the Ark of Law in order to receive the blessing of God and be protected from harm and evil.

> In a time of great danger, a man tells us in a Geniza letter, he went to the synagogue, opened the ark, and rolled himself on the floor beneath it, showing in this way his utmost contrition and humiliation before God and his need for heavenly intervention. He was saved and "both Jews and Muslims were happy about this and congratulated me. It was a glorious day because God had shown mercy upon us all. He had heard my prayer and had noticed my fasting and how I rolled myself beneath the holy ark."[12]

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[8] Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-al-Nihāya fi-al-Taʾrīkh*, ed. A.M. Muʿawwad, et al., 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1994), 14:50.

[9] Goitein states that "all flocked there for edification, or enjoyment, or both. Sometimes Muslims were invited by friends." S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967-93), 5:20. For a detailed discussion of Jewish pilgrimage to Dammūh, see pages 19-25. Also see Elíakim Camoly, *Itinéraires de la Terre Sante* (Brussels: A. Vandale, 1847), 488 n. 218. Carmoly remarks that the Synagogue at Dammūh "est la principal objet de la vénération des israélites en Égypte."

[10] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:156.

[11] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 5:20-24.

[12] Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 2:156.

This extraordinary act brought the Jew *baraka* to the extent that his Muslim associates understood the efficaciousness of this act. Engaging the holy did not only mean prayer and supplication or merely touching or kissing a Torah scroll, or, in the Muslim case, a copy of the Qur'an.

A Jew at the shrine of Elijah

The experiences of the fourteenth-century Karaite scribe to the ruler of Damascus Moses b. Samuel afford further insight into the veneration practices of medieval Syrian Jews. Jacob Mann in his study of Moses' *Dīwān* does not establish a connection between these shrines and the commemoration of Elijah, nor does he explain the ritual behavior associated with the shrine depicted in Moses' account. According to Moses' own testimony, he suffered a great deal at a time of oppressive measures imposed by the Mamluk ruler of Damascus upon the Jews. This forced him to dissimulate and outwardly accept Islam.[13] On the occasion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, sometime during the mid-fourteenth century, the ruler of Damascus compelled Moses to accompany him. Writing some years later, possibly after he left Damascus, Moses asserts his faithfulness to Judaism and the Bible by composing this work.[14] At one point he reveals his longing for making pilgrimage to the Synagogue of Elijah in Jawbar:

> On account of this my heart was sick and sad and I made pilgrimage (*aʿaleh*) to the Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah fasting, wearing a sackcloth and weeping. And I made a request before Him in the hidden enclosure. God, what will you give to me?[15]

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[13] For an introduction to the life of Moses b. Samuel see Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, O.H., Hebrew Union College Press, 1931-35), 2: 230 and Mann, "Moses b. Samuel, a Jewish Katib in Damascus, and His Pilgrimage to Medinah and Mekkah," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April 1919), 155-84. This account is also translated in Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 168.

[14] Mann conjectures that Moses may have fled Damascus and composed the *Dīwān* elsewhere. See Mann, "Moses b. Samuel," 156.

[15] Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 2:230. Mann translates "ve-efros baqashati lefanav" as "I prayed before him [God]," "Moses b. Samuel," 182." *Baqash* could be seen as referring to supplication, rather than prayer. The above translation follows the MS Berlin of the *Dīwān*. An alternate version is given by Mann:

> On account of this my heart was sick and sad and I made pilgrimage to the Synagogue of the Prophet Elijah and made a request before Him in the hidden enclosure of the cave. God, what will you give to me?

Furthermore, Moses is invoking his pilgrimage to Jawbar as a Jewish parallel of sorts to the Ḥajj. It is already evident that Moses did not merely approach the sanctuary for the purpose of praying there. The *meʿarah* or *khevyah* is supposedly where Elijah went to conceal himself "ve-neṣtarta" (1 Kings 17:3) from Ahab and Jezebel.

Moses enaged the holy as he entered the sacred precinct of Elijah's sanctuary. He sought to demonstrate his piety by describing his own behavior at a shrine of a prophet who was at the heart of Judaism. Wearing "sackcloth" is an act of self-humiliation, atoning for one's sins, and mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Like other Damascene Jews, he prayed, wept and humbled himself in the presence of God and Elijah, believing that in this ecstatic state he would reach across the divide which separated his world from that of the Prophet, believing that God through Elijah would be there to fulfill his wishes.[16] Jews made pilgrimage to these shrines for commemoration and for the purpose of seeking the intercession of God through the shrine's patron. Moreover, it is at this shrine that Moses turned to God in earnest to rid him of his evil master. Had he merely wished to pray before God, he might have done so in the presence of the Ark. Yet, he stood before the sanctuary of Elijah before he eventually ascended to deposit a petition to God in the Ark.[17] Moses' prostrating and humbling himself before the shrine and his depositing a petition to God in the Ark had the desired effect. He was free; his evil master had died of a heart attack.

Demarcating and perceiving the sacred

Jewish and Muslim devotees perceived and demarcated the sacred through the senses and through ritual interaction. They perceived and experienced extraordinary phenomena such as lights and visions of prophets and saints. What might be regarded as belief in the supernatural according to a rationalistic secular worldview, in the pre-modern context occurred within the framework of religion. Devotees witnessed lights, experienced visions and smelled sweet and pleasant odors emanating from tombs and shrines. They drank holy water and rubbed soil on themsleves, as did Christians. The soil from the tomb of the Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn who was martyred at Karbala in 61/680 was efficacious

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[16] Nemoy translates this expression as "supplicate." *Karaite Anthology*, 168.

[17] Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 2:231. For a description of the ark and the usage of the word *heikhal*, see *Mediterranean Society*, 2:145-47.

for a variety of reasons. Shi'ites even consumed soil and transported it to far away places, as they did holy water from the famous well at Zamzam, from which Muslim pilgrims bring back water after performing the Ḥajj or 'Umra. Through a sense of piety, devotion and adherence to tradition, the devotee recognized the importance of seeking, experiencing, and writing about the holy and constantly engaged the sacred through employing rituals. The unknown and mysterious were an essential part of this experience. At dusk, lights descended from the heavens upon tombs and shrines and other holy sites, or by some accounts, emanated from them, and illuminated the night sky. Such lights often designated the tomb of a prophet. The average Jew, Muslim or Christian did not ordinarily doubt the holiness of such sites. The twelfth-century Iberian poet Judah ha-Levi characterized the divine presence as attaching itself to prophets and manifesting itself in places worthy of God's divine light:

> Behold how the Divine Influence attached itself to Abraham, and then to all those who shared his excellence and the Holy Land. This influence followed him everywhere, and guarded his prosperity, preventing the detachment of any of them, it brought them to the most sheltered and best place, and caused them to occupy a degree worthy of such excellence. . . . HIS light shines in these places as in heaven although through mediums which are fit to receive this light. He sheds it upon them, and thus it is that is called love. It has been taught us, and we have been enjoined to believe in it, as well as to praise and thank Him in the prayer: 'With eternal love Thou lovest us' so that we should bear that it originally came from Him, but not from us.[18]

In an earlier passage, the ruler of the Khazar describes the divine presence as it manifests itself in perceptible phenomena:

> I understand the meaning of 'The Glory of God,' 'Angel of God,' and 'Shekhinah.' They are names applied by the Prophets to things perceptible, as 'Pillar of Cloud,' 'Consuming Fire,' 'Cloud,' 'Mist,' 'Fire,' 'Splendour,' as it is said of the light in the morning, in the evening, and on cloudy days that the rays of light go forth from the sun, although it is not visible. Yet we say that the rays of light are inseparable from the sun, although in reality this is not so. It is the terrestrial bodies which, opposite to it, are affected by it, and reflect its light.[19]

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[18] Judah ha-Levi, *Judah ha-Levi's Kitab al-Khazari*, ed. and trans. H. Hirschfeld (London: M.L. Cailingold, 1931), 100-1.

[19] Judah ha-Levi, *Judah ha-Levi's Kitab al-Khazari*, 77.

One of the most notable encounters with the holy in the Jewish context is that of the celebrated thirteenth-century Andalusian Jewish poet Judah al-Ḥarizi (1170-1235), who, while journeying to the Near East during the first quarter of the thirteenth century, was told of lights ascending from the tomb of Ezra the Priest in the Iraqi village of al-Kifl. In chapter thirty five of his *Taḥkemoni*, a series of *maqāmāt* (literary sessions), al-Ḥarizi, through his protagonist Ḥeman ha-Ezraḥi, comments that from the time of the discovery of Ezra's tomb, (which according to him, was discovered 160 years prior to his visit in ca. 1056-60),

> . . . there goes up from his grave on certain nights an illumination that dispels the thick darkness. Because of this phenomenon the people believe that the Glory of the Lord shines upon him (*kee-kavod ha-shem zaraḥ ʿalav*) and many people make pilgrimage (*yaʿaleh*) to him. Round about him are the graves of the seven upright saints. And on certain nights lights [descend] upon them, sparkling from the highest heaven and their rays come down upon earth (Ps. 73:9).[20]

Al-Ḥarizi who was a first-hand witness to the tomb's popularity, glorifies it through his narrator who refers to the light of holiness, which descended from the heavens and shone upon the tomb as "the Glory of the Lord" (*kavod ha-shem*). Although al-Ḥarizi's protagonist was at first skeptical of the holiness of this place, he eventually came to believe in its genuineness.

> Then I prostrated myself upon his grave before the Lord. On certain nights I went out with a great throng to see its illumination and to investigate the brightness of its splendor. Now when we saw it with our very eyes, I did not believe it, for I said: Perchance the denizens of the village, the Gentiles who reside in the cities round about, desire to mock us and deceive us and have purposely lit before us [bonfires].
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> So I paid close heed and looked because the light of a flame is red whereas the light of glory is pure as the sun.[21]

In discerning the true nature of the light through rational means and his sense of sight, al-Ḥarizi observes:

> For when the flame of brimstone goes up, is it not hidden in its darkness? Because the smoke of blackness is about its light so that it has not a bright light and its illumination is not pure and bright. But this

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[20] Judah al-Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemoni*, ed. and trans. V.E. Reichert, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: R.H. Cohen's Press, 1973), 2:208. Translations are Reichert's with modifications.

[21] Al-Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemoni*, 209.

> light (which we saw over the grave) is pure and clear. It shines in the darkness, dancing to the left and right, going up and down, whereas the flame of brimstone ascends heavily or lies low. But the light of the Glory goes up swiftly and easily.[22]

Al-Ḥarizi was not the only one to witness these lights. The twelfth century Jewish traveler Petaḥiyah of Regensburg observes that "Ezra, the scribe, is buried on the boundary of the land of Babylon. When the pillar of fire is over his grave, the structure erected on it is not visible on account of the brightness over his grave."[23]

Petaḥiyah's characterization of the light as a pillar of fire seemingly contradicts al-Ḥarizi's description. The difference can partly be explained by al-Ḥarizi's poetic language. Fire in the biblical context was also a sign of holiness.[24] When Moses beheld the burning bush, God commanded him to remove his shoes, "for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3:1-5). Before God revealed the Tablets of the Law on Mt. Sinai, Moses beheld the Glory of the Lord, which was "like a devouring fire on top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel" (Ex. 24:17). Similarly, in describing the tomb of the Companion Mudrik al-Fazārī, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, a sixteenth century author of a pilgrimage guide for Syria, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā Amākin al-Ziyārāt* (*The Book of Indications to Pilgrimage Sites*), commented that "It is a lofty tomb (*ḍarīḥ*), great, containing friendly atmosphere (*uns*), light (*nūr*) and blessing (*baraka*) to an immeasurable extent."[25]

So intimate, powerful and profound was the effect of light and holiness that writers never needed to define it. Devotees from different backgrounds knew what *baraka* was. At the alleged tomb of Noah in the town of al-Karak near Baʿlabakk, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī "saw lights (*anwār*) rising from the tomb (*ḍarīḥ*)."[26] In his *al-Nubdha al-Laṭīfa fi-al-Mazārāt al-Sharīfa* (*Concise Pamphlet Concerning Noble Pilgrimage Sites*), Yāsīn al-Biqāʿī (d. 1095/1684) associates the phenomenon with the tombs of prophets: "Many a time did I behold on Fridays and Mondays lights arising from the summit of... Mt. al-Rimthānī up to the sky. It is said that lights

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[22] Al-Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemoni*, 210.

[23] Elkan Nathan Adler, trans., *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages* (London: G. Routledge, 1930), 84-85.

[24] "Kedushah," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 9:867.

[25] ʿUthmān b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥawrānī, ed. Bassām al-Jābī, *Al-Ishārāt ilā Amākin al-Ziyārāt al-musmmā Ziyārāt al-Shām* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ghazālī, 1981), 136.

[26] Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *Ishārāt*, 143-47. Janine Sourdel-Thomine, "Inscriptions Arabes de Karak Nuḥ," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales*, 13 (1949-51), 71-84.

do not rise except from prophets' tombs. . . . In the case of Ezra the light descends."[27]

Writing in the twelfth century, the traveler al-Harawī mentions that "the village of Shayḥān[28] contains a tomb standing on the mountain upon which light (*nūr*) descends and the people see it. People allege that it is the tomb of Mūsā b. ʿImrān. . . . God knows best."[29] Referring to Wādī Jahannam outside of Jerusalem, al-Harawī comments that it "contains blessed sites (*mawāḍiʿ mubāraka*) and many tombs of the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*) and the Companions of the Prophet . . . except that they are no longer known because of the Franks taking control over the country."[30]

Others, like the thirteenth century Aleppan historian Ibn al-ʿAdīm (588/1192-660/1262), speak of similar phenomena. In the first section of *Bughyat al-Ṭalab fī Taʾrīkh Ḥalab*, an extensive biographical compendium of learned and prominent Aleppans of all ages, Ibn al-ʿAdīm speaks of the merits of Aleppo, which include light. Light was a sign of holiness and antiquity.

> In a village on this mountain known as Naḥla are graves upon which the spectator beholds light from the distance at night. When it gets close to them, he does not see anything. They have writing in Greek. Our friend Bahāʾ al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Khashshāb . . . told me that the Amir Sayf al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Qilij commanded that that inscription be translated and commissioned one of the Byzantine theologians in Aleppo. He translated it and it was found to contain, "This light is a gift from God the Great to us," or he mentioned words to that effect.[31]

Muslim writers frequently mention other sacred qualities manifesting themselves at sacred places which were not perceived visually, but spiritually, in particular pilgrimage places possessing a friendly atmosphere (*uns*), awe (*mahāba*), reverence (*ijlāl*), dignity (*waqār*), and blessing (*baraka*). Jews similarly employed such words as "awesome" (*nora*ʾ) and "holy" (*qadosh*) to describe pilgrimage sites. Such was the norm in medieval

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[27] Yāsīn al-Biqāʿī, *Al-Nubdha al-Laṭīfa fi-al-Mazārāt al-Sharīfa*, Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad, MS 11386, fol. 41v-42r.

[28] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, 6 vols. (Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus, 1866-73), 3:209-10.

[29] ʿAlī b. Abī Bakr al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā Maʿrifat al-Ziyārāt*, ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953), 18; ʿIzz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, *Al-Aʿlāq al-Khaṭīra fī Dhikr Umarāʾ al-Shām wa-al-Jazīra*, ed. Sāmī al-Dahhān (Damascus: al-Maʿhad al-Faransī lil-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabīya bi-Dimashq, 1962), 276.

[30] Al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 28.

[31] Al-Ṣāḥib Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-Ṭalab fī Taʾrīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988-89), 1:426.

pilgrimage guides. Jewish and Muslim writers intended to capture the spiritual and ritual aspects of the *ziyāra* in order to create a lasting impression upon readers and to encourage them to undertake it. While invoking Scripture, Moshe Baṣṣola (16th c.) commented that synagogues were holy or awesome because of visions, which devotees experienced as in the case of the Synagogue of Elijah in Damascus, which contained the Prophet's shrine: "How awesome is this place (*mah nora' ha-maqom ha-hu*)."[32] For a place to be awesome was a measure of its holiness in the eyes of devotees.

Apart from lights, tombs and shrines possessed other extraordinary qualities. While on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1414 C.E., Rabbi Elfarra of Málaga was told that a cloud ascends from the tomb of Ezra the Scribe in the Aleppan village of Taduf:[33] "At a distance of two miles from [Aleppo] is the tomb of Ezra the Scribe. There Ezra recorded the Torah. . . . This village is called Taduf [and contains] a synagogue. . . . They [also] say that every night year round a cloud ascends from the tomb of Ezra never departing."[34]

The discussion has focussed so far on the physical manifestations of the holy and ways of perceiving it. Ritual performance at sacred places was an important and necessary dimension of experiencing the holy. The most common forms of ritual include prayer, supplication, and making votive offerings. The totality of these acts affirmed the sanctity of holy places. For a shrine to be holy, it was necessary for devotees to physically interact with it. Thus, Muslims and Jews circumambulated shrines, the best known example in the Muslim case being the Kaʿba in Mecca. Some devotees also took soil from shrines and rubbed it on themselves and their animals in order to of be cured of illness. For the soil contained *baraka* or blessings of saints. Jews did the same. One Muslim theologian commented on people "praying to tombs, circumambulating them, kissing them, touching them (*istilām*),[35] rubbing their cheeks in their soil, worshipping their patrons, seeking aid from them, requesting from them aid, sustenance, health, fulfilling debts, dispelling worries, seeking aid against misfortunes or distress."[36]

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[32] Moshe Baṣṣola, *Maṣṣaʿot Ereṣ Yisraʾel le-Rabbi Moshe Baṣṣola*, ed. Y. Ben-Ẓcvi, (Jerusalem: ha-Ḥevrah ha-ʿIvrit le-Ḥaqirat Ereẓ Yisraʾel ve-ʿatiqoteiha, 1938), 68; Avraham Yaʿari, *Maṣṣaʿot Ereẓ Yisraʾel shel ʿOlim Yehudim mi-Yemei ha-Beinayim ve-ʿad Reshit Yemei Shivat Ẓiyon* (Ramat-Gan: Maṣadah, 1976), 152-53; Gen. 28:17: *mah nora' ha-maqom ha-zeh.*

[33] Yāqūt renders it as "Tādhif," *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, 1:811.

[34] Yaʿari, *Maṣṣaʿot*, 110. Compare al-Biqāʿī's description above.

[35] *Istilām* also denotes kissing, touching or wiping.

[36] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Ighāthat al-Lahfān min Māṣāyid al-Shayṭān*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqqī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1986), 1:220.

Suspending stones from a shrine or rubbing its earth on oneself were portable means for the recceipt of *baraka*. In Ḥimṣ devotees flocked to a talisman of a scorpion in order to be cured. Al-Harawī describes it, saying that "[If] some of its earth is taken and applied to a scorpion bite, it is healed (*tubra['/]*). It is tried-and-proven (*mujarrab*) well known (*maʿrūf*). It is transmitted throughout the lands."[37] Again, al-Harawī mentions that Aleppo "contains a rock visible at the Jew's Gate on the road to which votive offerings are made and upon which rosewater and sweet fragrances are sprinkled. Muslims, Jews and Christians hold it in regard. It is said that beneath it is the tomb of one of the prophets, may peace be upon them, or saints (*awliyā'*)."[38]

Since it was separated from the profane space around it by the sprinkling of rosewater and sweet fragrances, Muslims, Jews, and Christians knew that this site at the Jew's Gate, was sacred. The neighborhood of Aleppo near the Jew's Gate which included the Jewish Quarter, contained other sacred sites such as mosques, synagogues, and churches. This site was particularly sacred because of the holy person who lay buried there. It is not certain in the Jewish and Christian cases whether this holiness may have effused from neighboring places of worship or shrines. Such rituals and the manner of demarcating sacred space were undoubtedly replicated in other contexts.

The above passage also suggests that saints were no longer capable of producing the *baraka* which was responsible for the maintenance of the site. This did not mean that they could not perform miracles for the devout, but rather that they did not possess the capacity to perpetuate the sanctity of the sacred precinct within which they were buried. Lionel Rothkrug observed that devotees sanctified saints' shrines by sprinkling holy water, or some other substance which demarcated them from other places around them. Devotees were "manufacturing" the odor of sanctity.[39]

The twelfth-century ascetic traveler al-Harawī reports seeing in southern Aleppo ". . . a stone present at Bāb al-Yahūd on a path in which votive offerings (*nudhūr*) are made and on which rose water and fragrance are poured. Muslims, Jews and Christians hold it in regard. It is said that [it is among] the graves of a number of prophets, may

[37] Al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 4.

[38] Al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 4.

[39] Lionel Rothkrug, "The Odour of Sanctity, and the Hebrew Origins of Christian Relic Veneration," *Historical Reflections*, 8 (1981), 142.

peace be upon them, and saints. God knows best."[40] In a Cairene manuscript of the *Ishārāt*, al-Khaḍir's *mashhad* is mentioned among the tombs and sanctuaries of other saints. Incidentally, Ibn Shaddād reports that "North of Aleppo is a pillar to which Muslims, Jews and Christians make votive offerings (*yandhiruhu*). It is said that beneath it is the grave of a prophet."[41] The ritual maintenance by Jews, Christians, and Muslims of these and other sacred precincts endowed al-Khaḍir and the other inhabitants of this hallowed ground with perpetual holiness. The physical act of sprinkling rosewater and sweet fragrances on a road which was lined with graves and sanctuaries was guaranteed to ward off evil and to renew the holiness of the place.[42] Tombs of saints and holy men must give off sweet odors. The production of holiness for these holy men and prophets is recognition that they themselves could no longer "produce" holiness.

Ritual performance was a means of insuring harmony and continuity in holiness. Devotees consecrated the holy through prayer, supplication, making votive offerings, sprinkling fragrances and water and other rituals. Hence, not only was ceremonial interaction with the sacred necessary for its maintenance, but so too was physical contact. Ritual interaction was both spiritual and physical in nature. The physical component is examplified by devotees lying upon tombs, residing within the confines of holy places, circumambulating, touching, rubbing against or trodding on a site, taking away soil and rock, and applying it to themselves. To be at holy places in the presense of holiness gave the devotee a sense of awe, fear, purpose and spiritual fulfillment. Jewish travelers frequently commented on how Muslims venerated at their own as well as at common holy sites.

Three perspectives inform the designation of places as holy. First, original transmitters and recorders of traditions who drew upon ancient legends, stories, myths and events from Scripture acknowledged the existence of a core of sanctity within the confines of sacred space, stemming from the site, its association with a holy person, or both. Devotees situated the space within their religious framework. Second, the medieval writer, theologian or traveler made pilgrimage to holy sites and often

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[40] Al-Harawī, *Ishārāt*, 4. The salutation "May peace be upon them" is part of the text.

[41] 'Izz al-Dīn b. Shaddād, *Al-A'lāq al-Khaṭīra fī Dhikr Umarā' al-Shām wa-al-Jazīra*, ed. Dominique Sourdel (Damascus: al-Ma'had al-Faransī lil-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīya bi-Dimashq, 1953), 54.

[42] Lionel Rothkrug, "The Odour of Sanctity," 142.

quoted contemporary and ancient traditions, either from his own religious perspective or of other religions, including traditions which either lack or have no clearly defined scriptural or exegetical basis. He also defined it in relationship to its physical surroundings. The medieval writer tried to rediscover the sacred site in light of its "original state of sanctity." This was the objective of the fourteenth-century physician Eshtori ha-Parḥi who traveled to Jerusalem.[43] If not as explicit as Eshtori, other Jewish and Muslim travelers and pilgrims to al-Shām did exactly as pilgrims have done throughout the ages. They identified for themselves and for their reader the physical remains of the sacred past in light of the most authoritative sources known to them, Scripture and tradition. Apart from rare inscriptions, most ancient holy sites, with few notable exceptions, did not possess a written history before the Islamic era and were only "rediscovered" during the Middle Ages.[44] The common person perceived the sacred through his own personal experience and like the medieval writer, invoked Scripture, stories and legends in his veneration at the sacred site. Unlike medieval writers, other devotees did not actively invoke traditions, only essential elements contained within them, which were the basis for stories and legends. However, all devotees invoked Scripture.

What were the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities which prompted devotees and writers to comment on a locality's sanctity? Writers and other devotees perceived holiness through largely sensory and perceptual means as invoking visions and miracles and experiencing the extraordinary. Locations were not holy in and of themselves, but became so through their association with saints. *Baraka* was transmitted and miracles were performed within a locality that was sacred or was destined to become sacred. For most devotees identifying holiness thus constitutes the first essential component of "figurative mapping." In addition to these perspectives, the scholar of medieval Islam assesses the aforementioned perspectives and by necessity applies his own criteria to understanding sacred space.

A locality's sanctity is defined by its place in Scripture and exegesis; its association with eschatological traditions; the transmission of legends, myths, and stories from various periods in its history; performance of ritual within its confines; importing and exporting from it sacred objects

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[43] Eshtori ha-Parḥi, *Kaftor va-Perah*, ed. H. Edelmann (Berlin, 1852), fol. 47v.

[44] This notion of rediscovering, rather than inventing, sacred space, can be found most notably in the works of the sociologist of religion Mircea Eliade.

and substances (e.g., soil); the production and display of talismanic objects there; and, finally, its association with living and dead saints. In French's analysis, a number of these categories would also constitute the metaphorical mapping of sacred space.[45] Sacred and holy places in the Near East have virtually become synonymous with urban centers. The medieval city was a sacred space, more precisely, a complex series of sacred spaces in convergence, divergence, and isolation. Shrines and other holy places proliferated largely, though not exclusively, in urban centers. However, shrines did not emerge exclusively through urban growth, nor were cities the only receptacles of the *baraka* of holy men and women which tombs, shrines, and places of worship possessed. As was earlier suggested, sacred places, such as the congregational mosque, the cemetery, the mountain and their constituent holy precincts collectively defined the character of Islamic urban and rural settlements. Traditions commonly mention that cities contained *baraka* many times over.[46] In city, town and village, space and time combined with ritual (prayer, supplication, pilgrimage, etc.) to create the sacred. Although the city is the most developmentally advanced form of human settlement and the object of much scholarship, analyses of the Islamic city have for various reasons virtually neglected the so-called peripheries, the hinterlands, the districts and suburbs. Peters, in his study of Jerusalem and Mecca, while attempting to draw parallels with holy sites in other localities, marginalizes ritual activities in the towns and villages surrounding both cities. He regards such places as part of a pilgrimage network without sufficiently addressing their unique sacred character with the notable exception of the three Shi'i pilgrimage centers of Kufa, Karbalā' and Najaf.[47] The growth of holy cities and towns came about in the first instance through their association with holy persons. What were the varieties of the sacred and holy which manifested themselves in different settings, urban versus rural, natural versus "man-made/divinely-inspired" commemorative structures?

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[45] Dorothea R. French, "Mapping Sacred Centers: Pilgrimage and the Creation of Christian Topographies in Roman Palestine," in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum Ergänzungsband*, Teil 2 (Münster, 1995), 792.

[46] 'Alī b. Hibat Allāh Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī bi-Dimashq, 1951), 1:238-39. In one such tradition Makḥūl asks a man where he intended to dwell. He replies: "al-Ghūṭa (the Oasis of Damascus)," Makḥūl states: "What prohibits you from dwelling in Damascus, the *baraka* there is manifold (*muḍa"afa*)." Other traditions mention the efficacy of building in Damascus.

[47] F.E. Peters, *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

More importantly, to what extent was a town or village's sanctity predicated on that of the neighboring city? Is it appropriate to speak in terms of a dichotomy between center and periphery? Moreover, what was the relationship of the one to the other in the context of sacred topography, and more precisely, with regard to saints' shrines? Characterizing shrines, or other holy places, as urban or rural is not as essential as is understanding that there existed a variety of ritual practices and architectural forms which were common to cities and villages, such that they constituted a continuum of sacred topography and which brought villagers to cities and urban dwellers to the periphery in search of the sacred. The distinction between urban and rural never existed in the minds of devotees as they undertook pilgrimage. Illiterate devotees were perhaps as conscious of differences in the performance of ritual at shrines as they were of social distinctions. Though it is not always possible to clearly delineate between popular devotional acts and those of the elite, such acts as kissing, rubbing against a tomb, or taking soil from it were popular in nature and were never practiced by educated devotees, while reciting *ḥadīth* for the purpose of obtaining an *ijāza* (a license to teach and transmit a work or collection of traditions granted by a master to his pupil) was a ritual of the religious elite. Similar rituals performed by Jews and Muslims differed in their articulation.

During the thirteenth century, an epileptic Mongol man approached a shrine of an alleged descendant of Ḥusayn and was instantly cured of his condition. Upon earlier discovery of this shrine a blind man in the presence of a group of people took soil from the venerable tomb, placed it on his eyes, and was miraculously cured. Such ritual acts and the resulting miracles attested to the legitimacy of such holy places. Thus to pray, supplicate, or even disclose experiencing a dream concerning a sacred site are not alone sufficient to convince skeptics of the site's efficacy. Public displays of miraculous cures have always had a more powerful and everlasting effect.

The historian al-Yūnīnī quotes an account of the founding of a shrine in the name of an unspecified descendant of Ḥusayn, perhaps the legendary al-Muḥassin. During the late thirteenth century, the tomb appeared. The night vision of one Muḥammadūn b. al-Aqfāṣī and a village elder who subsequently experiences the vision (*ru'yā*) leads to its construction. As in the account of al-Bajanī, the saint who in referred to in the first instance as a "calling from the bread oven and the drain of the small bathhouse" appears. Such accounts about the founding of shrines are rare. Muḥammadūn received grace after the construction of the tomb

but only after being rebuked by the people. Such skepticism was a part of the foundation of any cult of saints. To validate Muḥammadūn's claims God produced a miracle which constituted the basis of the cult, in this case the curative properties of the shrine's soil.

> On the third of Ramaḍān 674/1276, the tomb (*ḍarīḥ*) of a descendant of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī . . . appeared in Mosul in the quarter of Suwayqat Ibn Khalīfa. The reason for its appearance was that a person called Muḥammadūn b. al-Aqfāṣī saw in a night vision a descendant of Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (*shakhṣ min wuld al-Ḥusayn*) . . . saying to him: "Oh Muḥammadūn, I am a calling (*munādin*) from the bread oven and the drain of the small bathhouse." When he awoke, he recounted the night vision to one of the elders (*baʿḍ al-akābir*) and consulted with him about excavating the tomb. The elder advised him against it. Muḥammadūn refrained.
>
> The following night, the elder saw the vision with his own eyes and was told, "Dig my tomb (*ḍarīḥ*) and do not ignore it. I tell you that the earth of the tomb cures all pains and diseases (*yashfī min jamīʿ al-ālām wa-al-asqām*)." When he arose the next morning, he dug the place and the tomb appeared. The people began to denounce him, whereupon a blind man took some of the earth of the tomb and left it on his eye. He regained his eyesight and said, "Allāhu akbar (God is great)" and praised Him. The people [then] saw the effect that tomb had and converged on it in crowds and Muḥammadūn enjoyed good grace on account of that. Many who were in pain and suffered from disabilities crowded around the tomb. All of those who took some of its earth and placed it on their pain, were instantly cured.[48]

No more compelling testimony to the shrine's authenticity was the conversion of a Mongol to Islam and his miraculous cure.

> A Mongol man who was afflicted with epilepsy heard of that and came and requested to be cured. Those who were in the place made it conditional upon him forgoing drinking wine, eating pig flesh [and] killing Muslims. He committed himself to that and took from the soil of the tomb and was instantly cured. He was happy about that and set out on a journey passing by Tall Ziyār which contained a Christian monastery. He stayed with the [monks] and told them what happened to him. The Christians said to him, "You were cured with what you applied to yourself and not because of this tomb."[49] These words affected him and he once again became afflicted with epilepsy. He

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[48] Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, 3:123-25.

[49] Ibn al-Zayyāt states: "One ought not to seek blessings from the tomb's soil, nor kiss it, for that is the customary practice (*ʿāda*) of the Christians. [Those practices] were not handed down by the ulema of the Muslims." *Al-Kawākib Sayyāra fī Tartīb al-Ziyāra fī-al-Qarāfatayn al-Kubrā wa-al-Ṣughrā* (Cairo, 1907), 16.

came to the tomb and requested some of its earth and was told, "Did you not take [earth] from it and were cured?" He said, "Indeed. But, I passed by a Christian monastery. I told them and they told me such and such. That then affected me and I once again became afflicted with what I had." He was told that time that its efficaciousness had ceased. "Now nothing of this tomb will benefit you except if you become a Muslim and bear witness that the grandfather of this lord is the Messenger of God. . . ." He refused to do so and continued for a number of days in a state of epilepsy. Then it increased until he was prepared to accept (*ahāba ilā*)[50] Islam. Then he came to the *mashhad*, became a Muslim and took some of its soil, was cured and was never again afflicted. He became a devout Muslim. A large group of Mongols converted [as did the] native Christians for that reason.

The sandal of the Prophet

Baraka was spiritual, perceptual and emotive, rather than conceptual. It may be said that *baraka* is the emanation and perpetuity of holiness in the person of a saint, which manifests itself in objects, or persons with whom he has come into contact posthumously or during his life. In addition to people, its most common receptacles include earth, water, rocks and trees, not to mention architectural forms such as tombs, shrines, mosques and other structures. *Baraka* was transmitted in four primary ways. First, it was transmitted through physical contact, such as touching, hugging and kissing a saint. Its recipient ordinarily does not receive enough of it to transfer it to a third party. Second, it was transmitted through the acquisition of knowledge and learning from a saint. Knowledge can be passed on, but not the personal *baraka* associated with it. Again, this very much depended on time, place, and circumstance. Third, it can be transmitted through possessing or either directly or indirectly acquiring relics or objects associated with a saint, most commonly a garment such as a *thawb*, *ʿabāʾa* or *khirqa* which were occasionally worn as headgear. Such objects maintained their *baraka* as they were passed from one generation to the next, as in the case of the relics of the Prophet Muḥammad—his hair, nail pairings, sandals, mantle and footprints. The Sufi *khirqa* was conferred successively from master to disciples.[51] Finally, it can be acquired through encountering and touching a saint in a dream and receiving his *baraka*. The latter

[50] Lit.: to honor or respect.

[51] For a discussion of the relics of the Prophet, see David S. Margoliouth, "The Relics of the Prophet Mohammed," *Moslem World* 27 (1937), 20-27; Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muḥammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

category is often connected with Sufi initiation rites. Since a dream or vision is a unique occurrence; its *baraka* is time and place specific.

Scholars and theologians rarely had occasion to define *baraka* in the context of saint veneration because it was universally understood. Or was it? *Baraka* was not the focus of scholarly discussion in the same vain as sainthood (*walāya*), saints, and miracles. However, theologians had occasion to address *baraka* in their writings when its transmission became a source of contention, particularly in the context of purported saints. Some conceived of *baraka* not as an extraordinary force, but rather as a quality of the exemplary learning and piety which some shaykhs possessed. An advocate of this view was Ibn Taymīya, one of the leading opponents of pilgrimage to saints' tombs, whose observations shed light on the social context in which it arose.

> When the noble sandal of the Prophet . . . came into the possession of its present owner al-Malik al-Ashraf and came to him whilst in Damascus, he desired to send it to my father so that he might make *ziyāra* to it and obtain *baraka* from it. Then he said, "We have missed the Shaykh. It is befitting that we travel to him. We shall inform him to visit (*yazūr*) this noble relic (*athar sharīf*) and behold it." He sent him [word of that]. My grandmother who was then still alive said to my father, "I have longed to visit this holy relic, visit it in my stead." When he traveled to Damascus and visited the holy relic, he informed al-Malik al-Ashraf what his mother had said. Al-Ashraf prepared [to send] the holy relic to Baʿlabakk [especially for her]. She made a visit to it and fulfilled her desire from that. A story [centered around] this holy relic that necessitated transferring it to al-Malik al-Ashraf. That is, its previous owner Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd used to travel around with it taking it to rulers and they would give him great sums in return. One year, he sought the patronage of al-Malik al-Ashraf. . . . He used to give him generous gifts. Al-Malik al-Ashraf said to him, "I desire that you give me [a bit] of this holy relic the size of a chick-pea so that I could place it in my burial shroud when I die." He complied with his request and al-Ashraf gave him 30,000 dirhams.[52]

Presumably this relic or its twin was housed in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus along with the copy of the Qur'an written by the Caliph ʿUthmān in his own hand. Al-Nuʿaymī reports that when al-Malik al-Ashraf endowed the Ashrafīya, he deposited there the sandal (*naʿl*) of the Prophet.[53] After the sixteenth century, it was never again publically

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[52] Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, 2:45-46.

[53] ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Nuʿaymī, *al-Dāris fī Taʾrīkh al-Madāris* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1990), 1:15.

displayed in Damascus. It was thought to be buried in the "southern wall" of the Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ashrafīya there.[54] In controlling access to this relic, al-Malik al-Ashraf "controlled" the dispensing of *baraka*. The above example indicates that *baraka* was portable and that fragments from a relic also possessed *baraka*.

The baraka of saints

Baraka not only manifested itself in living saints and holy objects, but so too in dead saints and shrines. The author of a fifteenth-century Egyptian pilgrimage guide mentions that in performing pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to saints' shrines, the devotee "seeks their aid, requests from them fulfillment of his needs, and positively resolves himself to their *baraka*." He adds:

> If the dead to whom pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) is made is among those whose *baraka* is sought, then the intercession of God the Exalted is sought through him. Likewise, the visitor seeks the intercession of him whom he sees as dead from those whose *baraka* is sought through the Prophet.... Rather, the visitor begins by seeking the intercession of God the Exalted through the Prophet... since He is the Support in intercession and the ultimate source and enabler of all of this.[55]

God is the ultimate source of *baraka* from whom it is sought through the intercession of the Prophet and the saint. Dead and living saints possessed *baraka*. So holy were some saints that devotees clamored to obtain the remaining water and lotus fruit with which the corpse of the saint was washed. Articles of saints' clothing or other personal effects were auctioned off at times. As a rule, those who possessed *baraka* possessed exemplary learning, knowledge and piety. Rulers, disciples and ordinary devotees sought these men for their *baraka*. Many an important ruler such as Nūr al-Dīn (r. 541/1147-569/1174) and Salāḥ al-Dīn (r. 564/1169-589/1193) visited saints in order to receive their *baraka*.

Is it apt to characterize *baraka* as exclusively a saintly force? There were individuals who defied this ideal of saintliness, piety and religiosity. To possess *baraka* an individual had to possess charisma. Rulers were charismatic, yet few actually possessed this sacred quality, or were posthumously endowed with it. One interesting character who lived during the twelfth century was the Damascene saint Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qamīnī

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[54] Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *Ishārāt*, 30.

[55] Muḥammad b. al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1929), 1:254.

who gained a following among the common people of Damascus. Yūsuf went around wearing ritually impure garments, urinated in his robes, and did not pray. Yet, this did not prevent a woman from placing her hand on his shoulder in order to obtain *baraka*. Her critic was chided by the saint in a dream. He was not the only mad saint; to be sure, there were others who roamed the streets and who were inspired to attract people through their spiritual states and their often unintelligible ravings. Rulers were afraid to openly challenge these popular saints, even though they might have spoken ill of them.

The grandfather of the Aleppan historian al-Yūnīnī, who was also a Sufi was renowned for his *baraka* in his lifetime. Shaykh Muḥammad's servant witnessed him in the year 658/1260 as he transferred his *baraka* to his companion Shaykh ʿUthmān in a male bonding ritual of sorts.

> Al-Yūnīnī said: Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Dā'im narrated to me: "I used to serve the shaykh, the jurisprudent. One day Shaykh ʿUthmān came [to visit] from Dayr Nāʿis.[56] He was with his children or in another place." [ʿAlī] said, "Shaykh ʿUthmān said, 'I used to long for the Shaykh, the jurisprudent to bare his chest and to embrace him with mine and to give me the garment that he was wearing.'" ʿAlī said: "Shaykh ʿUthmān and the fakirs accompanying him came and brought out the food. When they had finished eating,[57] he said to Shaykh ʿUthmān's companions: 'Get up, Shaykh ʿUthmān does not leave at the moment.' When they left, he said: 'Arise, oh Shaykh ʿUthmān.' When he stood up, Shaykh Muḥammad bared his chest, embraced him and gave him the garment he was wearing. [Shaykh Muḥammad] said: 'When it becomes worn, I shall give you another.'"[58]

In this as in previous examples, *baraka* required physical contact with the person of a saint. Not only was it attained through physical contact, but also through the acquisition of personal belongings or relics, most commonly, as in the above cases, a garment of some sort. This is also attested to in the Christian case, for instance, of the cult of St. Martin in late antique Gaul, where it was widely believed that while the saint was still alive people "pulled threads from his clothes and gathered the straw on which he had slept as relics that later protected them from illnesses."[59] In early sixteenth-century Syria:

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[56] An Aleppan village.

[57] Literally, "When Shaykh ʿUthmān and the fakirs accompanying him came and brought out the food, and finished eating. . . ."

[58] Al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl*, 2:61.

[59] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

> On Wednesday 16 Rabīʿ II 921/1515, The Syndic of the Nobles al-ʿUjaymī came from Noble Jerusalem accompanied by the paternal nephew of Abū al-Faḍl b. Abī al-Luṭf al-Maqdisī both wearing robes of honor. Accompanying them were among the Prophet's relics . . . a drinking vessel (*qadaḥ*) and part of a walking stick (*ʿukkāz*), covered and being carried upon the head of a man before Malik al-Umarā' (Sībāy), the judges, the Sufis of Damascus (*mutaṣawwifat Dimashq*) and others. Before them (i.e., the relics) were standards and luteplaying. Many of the common people came out to behold that. I asked about [both relics]. It was said that they were in the possession of Ibn Abī al-Luṭf's father. The deputy ruler sent for them so that he would receive blessings from them. Then it became apparent that they are not from among the relics of the Prophet (*al-athar al-nabawī*), but rather from those of al-Layth b. Saʿd, which were in the possession of the Qalqashandīs.[60]

Other instances include the walking stick of an Aleppan shaykh which was used by his companion's family after his death to ensure a plentiful supply of food for themselves and the poor who visited them. Ibn ʿUthmān, the author of an Egyptian pilgrimage guide, *Murshid al-Ẓuwwār ilā Qubūr al-Abrār* mentions that Shaykh Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Raslān (d. 571/1175) caused the grain of the merchants to multiply. "One day a Jewish man came to him and he placed his hand in the wheat and then left. The grain was sold instantly."[61] Jews undoubtedly sought the *baraka* of Muslim saints as in this instance.

A saint's association with a well, the fact that he dug it or drank from it, is sufficient to insure its *baraka*. The Damascene Shaykh Arsalān built a well that became a pilgrimage site to where devotees flocked to obtain *baraka* from its water.

> He dug the well that is there with his hand. The people of that neighborhood drink from it and receive blessings from its water (*yatabarrakūna bi-mā'ihā*). [Whoever has a stomachache or any pain and drinks from it will be cured with God the Exalted's permission. Many have tried it].[62]

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[60] Muḥammad b. Ṭūlūn, *Iʿlām al-Warā bi-Man Waliya Nā'iban min al-Atrāk bi-Dimashq al-Shām al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Duhmān (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa wa-al-Jarīda al-Rasmīya, 1964), 209. The Qalqashandīs were a famous Jerusalemite family of Shafi'i scholars originally from Qalqashanda in Egypt. See C.E. Bosworth, "al-Ḳalḳashandī," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New edition, 4:509-11.

[61] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿUthmān, *Murshid al-Ẓuwwār ilā Qubūr al-Abrār*, ed. M.F. Abū Bakr (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣrīya al-Lubnānīya, 1995), 635.

[62] Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Ghāyat al-Bayān fī Tarjamat al-Shaykh Arsalān*, ed. A. Ibesch (Damascus, 1984), 48. The bracketed text is added from Ibn al-Ḥawrānī, *Ishārāt*, 89.

Conclusion

Baraka is an emotive and spiritual force perceived through the senses and experienced through the religious psyche. However, not all Muslims agreed that *baraka* could be obtained from dead saints. Entreating dead saints in the eyes of Ḥanbalite theologians was tantamount to heretical innovation and unbelief. The thirteenth-century theologian Ibn Taymīya who polemicizes against the cult of saints observed that some Muslims visited Christian places and sought *baraka* from priests.

> Christians mainly venerate the relics (*āthār*) of their saints (*qiddīsūn*). It is not improbable that they passed this [practice] to some ignorant Muslims, namely that this is the tomb of one whom the Muslims extol so that they would agree to venerate him with them. How is it not seeing that they have misguided many ignorant Muslims such that they even began to baptize their children by alleging that it insures longevity for the infant? The Christians even got them to visit the cathedrals and churches they glorify. Many ignorant Muslims even made votive offerings to places which the Christians venerate. By the same measure, many visit churches and seek blessings (*yaltamisūna al-baraka*) from their priests, monks and the like.[63]

In a responsum, he polemicizes against Muslims engaging in practices which he regarded as heretical:

> The one who seeks the aid of his shaykh requesting that his heart be made sound from that disaster and the one who visits his shaykh and touches (*yastalim*) his tomb, rubs his face against it (*yamragh*), wipes his hand (*yamsaḥ*) on it and in turn wipes both hands on his face and the likes of that; the one who seeks [his Shaykh] with his need and says: "Oh so-and-so by your blessing" or who says: "Fulfill my need through the *baraka* of God and so-and-so;" concerning the one who holds a musical session, comes to the tomb, bears his face and places it (*yaḥuṭṭ*) on the ground before his shaykh whilst prostrating himself.[64]

Baraka was commonly believed to be a quality of intercession. Through following a series of rituals from touching a tomb to touching oneself, the devotee appropriated *baraka*. Similarly the tenth-century Karaite theologian Sahl b. Masliaḥ polemicizes against the Rabbanites who

> visit the graves (*yamurrū ilā*), perfume them with incense (*yubakhkhirū lahā*), believe in (*yaqūlūna bi-*) spirits (*shedim*) and request fulfillment of their needs (*yasalū ḥawā'ijahum*) from the dead and spend the night at

[63] Aḥmad b. Taymīya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad b. Taymīya*, ed. 'A. al-'Āṣimī, 37 vols. (Riyad: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1991), 27:460-61.

[64] Ibn Taymīya, *Majmū Fatāwā*, 27:64.

> the tomb (*yabītū maʿa al-qabr*) if their needs are not fulfilled during the day as Scripture says "[a people] who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places" (Is. 65:4). In Iraq, they repair to (*yamḍū ilā*) Shafūta[65] and to the tombs of Ezekiel and Barukh where they perfume them with incense (*yubakhkhirūnahum*) and entreat them (*yasalū al-ḥawāyij*) (alt. make requests) and in Syria to Dalata and ʿArāba and request their needs (*yaṭlubū murādātihim*) at the tombs of R. Yossi and such-and-such Rabbi.[66]

Baraka could cease to manifest itself or be revoked through the destruction of a holy place or pilgrimage site. Sometimes devotees for whatever reason abandoned places which were thought to possess *baraka*.

Although *baraka* is not explicitly mentioned in the writings of Jewish travelers, the fundamental forms of ritual performed by Jews and Muslims at holy places, shrines, tombs, and places of worship such as mosques and synagogues indicates that this potent force was always present among devotees. Sustaining *baraka* required the performance of ritual at holy places. It was either portable as in relics, devotional objects, or venerable copies of Scripture, or manifest in shrines and other commemorative structures. It was also contained in holy water from sacred wells and springs which Muslims, Jews and Christians bottled up or sacred soil from around tombs, shrines and talismans which they applied to scorpion stings and snake bites or applied to their eyes to cure blindness.

The manifestation of *baraka* demanded physical and spiritual interaction with the object which embodied it. Supplication, prayer and seeking a cure were tantamount to seeking *baraka* for through these acts medieval devotees strengthened their faith in God.

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[65] Mann suggests a possible corruption of Shafītīb (Nehardea), *Texts and Studies*, 1:87 n. 105.

[66] Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 1:87-88.